

| CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  |   |
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| Project Name: Triangle Whitewater Fiber Line  | Proposed Implementation Date: Spring 2021 |
| Proponent: Triangle Communications, PO Box 1140, Havre, MT 59501  |   |
| Type and Purpose of Action: The proponent proposes to install an underground telecommunications cable within a right-of-way 20' wide (10' on either side of a centerline) across School Trust land in Phillips County. This line will be "knifed in" (entrenched using machinery that requires very little digging, usually a line about 12" wide at most). The line will allow for improved telecommunication capabilities in this rural area and the surrounding communities. |   |
| Location: E2E2, N2NW4, NW4NE4, of Sec 9, TWP 37N, RGE 32E   | County: Phillips                          |

| I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT  |   |
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| 1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. | The Right-of-Way application from Triangle was received by the Glasgow Unit Office (GUO) and reviewed by GUO staff. Triangle staff was contacted to discuss the easement application during processing.   |
| 2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:   | No other governmental agencies have jurisdiction over this project as it pertains to School Trust lands. Montana DNRC, Real Estate Management Bureau has jurisdiction over the project.   |
| 3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:   | <p>Action Alternative: Grant permission to Triangle Communications to install the telecommunications line on School Trust land.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Deny permission to Triangle Communications to install the telecommunications line on School Trust land.</p> |

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

| RESOURCE   | POTENTIAL IMPACTS  |
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| <p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compatible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>  | <p>The area of impact consists of the following soil types/complexes: Scobey-Phillips complex, Kevin-Scobey-Phillips association, Scobey-Kevin clay loams, Scobey clay loam, Ferd loam, Phillips loam, Ethridge clay loam, and Evanston loam. with 0-8% slopes. Some areas with a steeper slope are generally more susceptible to runoff erosion. No unusual geologic features are present.</p> <p>Action Alternative: There would be temporary soil disturbance due to the digging (knifing) required to install the line. This disturbance is relatively shallow and does not remove/displace any soil. Slight soil compaction would occur due to temporarily vehicle/machinery use.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no changes to soils on the School Trust land.</p> |
| <p>5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?</p> | <p>There are no important water resources present within the area of impact. There is no potential for impact on drinking water in the area.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The proposed project would not negatively impact the quality, quantity and distribution of water.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, there would be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution.</p>   |
| <p>6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality</p>  | <p>This project is not influenced by any air quality regulations or zones. A short-term increase in vehicle traffic</p>  |

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?

would result in a slight increase in dust. No pollutants would be produced.

Action Alternative: This type of project on the School Trust land would have minimal impact to the air quality. Some dust may occur due to vehicle use.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no impacts to air quality.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?

The acreage within the area of impact consists farmland seeded annually or semi-annually with small grains and pulse crops. The area of impact is managed for agricultural production. No rare plants or cover types are present.

Action Alternative: The telecommunications line would have no impact on the vegetative community due to the knifing process used to install the line.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no impacts to the plant communities on the School Trust land.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?

The School Trust land provides habitat for antelope, upland birds, songbirds and deer. There is potential for recreation on these tracts due to ease of access from adjacent county roads.

Action Alternative: Any impacts due to installation of the line would be small and would be mitigated quickly with the return to normal management practices.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no impacts to the possible use of the School

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

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|  | Trust land as wildlife habitat.  |
| 9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern? | <p>This project is within General Greater Sage-Grouse habitat as outlined by the Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team (MSGOT). Triangle submitted the project to MSGOT for review prior to submitting the application, and received approval, along with guidelines to follow, back from MSGOT.</p> <p>No wetlands are within the area of impact. The following species of concern are listed as being at least seasonally present within the area of impact: Baird's Sparrow, McCown's Longspur, Long-billed Curlew, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Sprague's Pipit, Ferruginous Hawk, and Swift fox.</p> <p>Action Alternative: By following the recommendations made by MSGOT, impacts to sage-grouse would be mitigated during and after the installation process. Any other impacts due to installation of the line would be small and would be mitigated quickly with the return to normal management practices.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no impacts to the environmental resources.</p> |
| 10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?  | <p>The area of impact is an agriculture farm field that has been farmed and tilled for years eliminating signs of cultural and archaeological resources.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The proposed project would have no impact on historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impact to historical or archaeological sites under this alternative.</p>   |

## II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?

The proposed project is directly adjacent to county roads, so the project would be readily visible to the public. The project is in a sparsely populated area.

Action Alternative: An underground line in this area would not alter the aesthetics at all. After installation, there would be no visible impacts besides above ground marker posts.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no impacts to aesthetics associated with the School Trust land.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?

Environmental resources in the area are not specifically limited and are not affected by the proposed project. No nearby activities would affect the project.

Action Alternative: The proposed project would place no additional demands on any environmental resources in the area.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no demands placed on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?

Approval has been granted for construction of a pump station that will service TransCanada's Keystone XL pipeline that is also permitted to be installed across this tract.

Action Alternative: This project would provide service to the pump station and fits into other plans/projects on this tract of School Trust land.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would reduce telecommunication capabilities at this pump station on School Trust land.

### III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

| RESOURCE  | POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES  |
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| 14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?                                | <p>The operation and movement of heavy equipment and vehicles has inherent risks that are not impacted by access across the School Trust land.</p> <p>Action Alternative: The installation of the cable would slightly increase the risk of fire during the project due to increased vehicle traffic.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no impacts to human health or safety.</p>  |
| 15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities? | <p>The area of impact is classified as agricultural acreage and is managed for production of small grains and/or pulse crops.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Any short-term disturbance to vegetation on the tract would be too small to have a measurable economic impact on the agricultural activities on this tract.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no impacts to agricultural activities on the School Trust land.</p> |
| 16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.    | <p>Action Alternative: The project would not create nor impact any jobs in the area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment under this alternative.</p>  |
| 17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?                          | <p>Action Alternative: The project would have no impacts on the local and state tax base and tax revenues.</p>   |

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|   | <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the local and state tax base under this alternative.</p>  |
| <p>18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?</p>                                    | <p>Action Alternative: The project would increase vehicle traffic in the area during installation. There would be no additional demand for governmental services.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no additional demand for government services.</p>  |
| <p>19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or management plans in effect?</p>  | <p>There are no special management plans in effect on the School Trust land. It is managed for typical agricultural activities (livestock grazing and crop production).</p> <p>Action Alternative: The project has cleared State (DNRC) management plans.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no impacts to locally adopted environmental plans and goals.</p> |
| <p>20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?</p> | <p>These tracts are accessible from adjacent county roads, and this project would have no impact on that access.</p> <p>Action Alternative: No changes to public land access or recreational potential would occur.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the recreational values associated with the School Trust land under this alternative.</p>                       |
| <p>21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?</p>   | <p>Action Alternative: The project would not impact the density and distribution of population and housing.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the density and</p>   |

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|  | distribution of population and housing.  |
| 22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible? | <p>Action Alternative: The project would enhance telecommunications capabilities for residents in the surrounding area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the social structures under this alternative.</p>   |
| 23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?         | <p>Action Alternative: The project would not impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of this rural area.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative.</p>   |
| 24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:   | <p>This telecommunications project is intended to provide greater telecommunication capabilities in the surrounding area/communities. This is a very rural area with limited capabilities currently.</p> <p>Action Alternative: Allowing installation of the cable across School Trust land would have little economic impact to the School Trust but would provide surrounding communities with increased telecommunications capabilities.</p> <p>No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts to the social and economic circumstances under this alternative.</p> |

EA Checklist Prepared By: s/Luke Gunderson\s Date: 1/19/2021  
 Luke Gunderson, Land Use Specialist

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| IV. FINDING               |                    |
| 25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED: | Action Alternative |
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